DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 579 UD 023 977

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TITLE American-Hispanics in a Pluralistic Society.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; Bilingual Education; *Cultural Pluralism; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnicity; *Hispanic Americans; Political Attitudes; Social Attitudes; Social Integration

ABSTRACT

To determine whether Hispanics in America favor assimilation or pluralism, 255 Chicago Hispanics were surveyed. Results showed that changes in their cultural patterns and movement toward assimilation were minimal. Although some assimilation was occurring, a certain degree of separateness (based on religion, ethnic identity, and behavioral patterns) existed and will be sustained in the future. A majority (84%) liked America and believed Hispanic children should learn English (94%), but they also favored maintenance of Spanish (85%), and bilingual education (83%). Similarly, while a majority did not favor endogamy (52%) and desired to become American (54%), most wished to retain their ethnic identity. Almost two-thirds (62%) felt that Hispanics must "fight for their rights," but a majority stated that political and economic interests were not the reasons for retaining one's ethnic identity. Most respondents felt they had control over and freedom in their lives to achieve what they wished, and, in general, the Hispanic sample felt there was an absence of prejudice and discrimination against them. Overall, the findings indicated that at least partial assimilation was the goal of the sample. (KH)

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AMERICAN-HISPANICS IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

by

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&

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Absorption of minority cultures by the majority culture has been a powerful American social process. To become more American and less ethnic has always been assumed to be the goal for immigrants. Assimilation has been the rule, but pluralism is proving to be a significant outcome rather than the exception.

Immigrant Hispanics appear to be following this trend. Their influence in education (e.g. bilingual/bicultural education) and local politics is becoming significant in the 1980's. Their population increase of 61% to 14.6 million since 1970 (19 million counting "undocumented" Hispanic aliens) coupled with the cultural forces of language and religion appear to make Hispanics a political power to be dealt with in the 1980's. Their influence will depend on their desire to maintain their ethnicity or to become assimilated. Do Hispanics favor assimilation or pluralism? Or do they favor some stage in between?

To answer this question, 255 Chicago-Hispanics were surveyed (Chicago has 422.061 Hispanics or 14% of its population). The sample included 23% Mexicans, 36% Puerto Ricans, 29% Cubans and 11% South Americans (Bolivians, Ecuadorians, etc.). Thirty-three percent were blue collar workers, 60% teachers and 7% high school students. Only 11% were born in the United States, 18% in Mexico, 31% in Puerto Rico, 28% in Cuba, and 10% in South America. Eighty-nine percent of the total sampled were born outside the United States. The data were also analyzed by gender, marital status and number of children in family.

To determine the degree of assimilation, Gordon's (1979) stages of assimilation were used: 1) Acculturation, 2) structural assimilation, 3) marital assimilation, 4) identificational

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assimilation, 5) attitudinal receptional assimilation, 6) behavioral receptional assimilation, and 7) civic assimilation.[1] The questionnaire included quotations under each of the seven categories. The responses are categorized according to the assimilation stages in Table I. The sample was administered a 37-item questionnaire.

[1]Gordon, Milton, Assimilation in American Life. New York: Oxford Press, 1979.

TABLE 1

RESPONSES OF ASSIMILATION SURVEY

I. ACCULTURATION (Changes of cultural patterns to those of host society, entrance on secondary group level.)

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Do you like America?	84	10	6
Is it important to speak good English?	88	8	4
Is it important that your or other Hispanic children learn English?	94	2	4
Should children maintain their language or learn Spanish?	85	7	8
Do you favor bi-lingual education in the schools?	83	11	6
Does the father (husband) make most decisions in the family?	52	37	11
Does the mother (wife) make most of the decisions in the family?	25	64	11
Do both husband and wife together make family decisions?	65	25	10
Is cooperation more important than competition in life and school?	71	18	11
Do you like your ethnic food better than American food?	71	20	9
Do you like your ethnic music better than American music?	62	32	6
Is it important for you to keep your religious belief?	77	16	7
Is your career (work) more important than helping your parents, brothers and sisters?	22	72	6
Do you feel responsible to help your mother, father, sister and brother with money if needed?	86	9	5

II. STRUCTURAL ASSIMILATION (Large scale entrance into cliques, clubs, institutions of host society, on primary group level)

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Are all of your best friends Hispanic?	53	46	1
Are most of your best friends Hispanic?	65	33	2
Do you have good friends of other ethnic groups?	81	16	3
Would you like to have more good friends of a different ethnic group?	69	22	9
Do you wish to return to your homeland (country)?	57	33	10
Would you move away from the Hispanic neighborhood if you could?	44	37	19

III. MARITAL ASSIMILATION (Large scale intermarriage)

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Would you marry only a Hispanic of your ethnic group?	34	52	16
Would you marry a Hispanic of a different ethnic group?	57	25	18
Would you marry someone who is not Hispanic?	58	23	19

IV. IDENTIFICATIONAL ASSIMILATION (Development of sense of peoplehood based excusively on host society)

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Do you wish to become American?	54	33	13
Would you like to have an anglo rather than a Hispanic name?	20	70	10
Do you wish to be called a Hispanic (Mexican, or Puerto Rican or Cuban)?	66	26	8
Do you wish to be called a Hispanic American?	51	40	9

IV. IDENTIFICATIONAL ASSIMILATION (CONT'D)

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Do you wish to be called American only?	12	81	7
Being Hispanic is important because of its cultural and religious heritage?	66	18	16

V. ATTITUDINAL RECEPTIONAL ASSIMILATION (Absence of prejudice)

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Are you prejudice against Anglos?	22	69	9
Do you like Anglos?	71	17	12

VI. BEHAVIORAL RECEPTIONAL ASSIMILATION (Absence of discrimination)

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Do you discriminate against Anglos?	16	72	12
Do you feel discriminated against by Anglos?	36	53	11

VII. CIVIC ASSIMILATION (Absence of value and power conflict, based on ethnicity).

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Being Hispanic is important because it means political and economic power?	25	53	22
Do you think Hispanic need to fight for their rights in American society?	62	20	18
Do you feel you can achieve what you wish?	77	11	12
Planning for the future is just as important as planning for the present?	83	10	7

FINDINGS

The results showed that changes in their cultural patterns and movement toward assimilation, were minimal. Although the majority (84%) liked America and believed Hispanic children should learn English (94%), they favored maintenance of Spanish (88%) and bilingual education (83%). In relation to decision-making in the Hispanic family there appears to be an ambivalent shift from the strongly patriarchal (or lineal) to a democratic structure (65%) in which both parents make family decisions. Cubans were divided (48% yes, 45% no) on the issue of shared decision-making. There was no shift in cultural values in terms of ethnic diet (71%) and music (62%). Religion in Hispanic life was important (77%). Cooperativeness was favored over competitiveness by 71 percent of the sample. This is a reflection of the Hispanic "personalism", the reliance on networks of personal relations (e.g. family and extended family) rather than on impersonal social agencies and systems, as Americans do. This was supported by 72% who stated that helping one's family was more important than one's career. This also included financial support (86%). The data also indicate that the assimilation (absorption by majority culture) has not begun. Although, the sample said they had good friends (81%) and would like to have more good friends (69%) of a different ethnic group, all (53%) and most (65%) of their best friends were Hispanics. Also, 57 percent of the respondents wished to return to their homeland. The only exceptions were Cubans.

Mass intermarriage (between ethnic/racial groups) is a definite indicator of assimilation. The responses show that 52 percent do not favor endogamy (marrying only members of its own ethnic group). However, 57 percent would marry a Latino of a different ethnic group (e.g. Puerto Rican to a Cuban). The Mexican sample was divided on this question. What is more significant is that 58% would marry non-Hispanics. Including the Mexican respondents the willingness to marry a mate outside one's ethnic group does indicate a trend toward assimilation. Intermarriage, on the other hand, may not mean assimilation, if it is not

accepted by the majority society.

Another important factor of assimilation is the basis of one's identity. While the majority (54%) desired to become Americans they wished to retain their ethnic identity. Seventy percent wanted to keep their Hispanic name and to be called by their ethnic (66%) name (Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, etc.) rather than an anglo name. Fifty-one percent agreed to being called a Latin-American, but not American only (81%). Even among the eleven percent sample born in the United States, 81% did not wish to be called only Americans. The majority (66%) also felt that their culture and religion were integral parts of the Hispanic experience. It is apparent that the sample's identity is based on its native culture.

Seventy-one percent of the sample said they liked anglos and 69 percent were not prejudiced against anglos. Seventy-two percent said they did not discriminate nor feel discriminated against (53%) by anglos. The only exceptions to this were Puerto Ricans (51%) and Puerto Ricans born in Puerto Rico (52%) who felt that anglos discriminated against them. (Thirty-six percent of the sample was Puerto Rican of which 90% was born in Puerto Rico.) In general, the Hispanic sample felt there was an absence of prejudice and discrimination.

In terms of civic assimilation (the absence of value and conflict based on ethnicity), the responses show that 62 percent felt that Hispanics must "fight for their rights in the United States". However, 53 percent stated that political and economic interests were not the reasons for retaining one's ethnic identity. The rationale for this question is that as native cultural characteristics are modified by acculturation, they become increasingly more symbolic as vehicles for mobilizing their political, economic and social interests. Also ethnicity become more salient (than e.g. social class) because it combines interest (political, economic, etc.) with an affective tie (religion, customs, etc.). Seventy-seven percent felt they had control over and freedom in their lives to achieve what they wished. This supported their contention of non-discrimination by the majority culture. Planning for the future (83%) appeared to be an integral cultural part the sample, implying "delayed

gratification" an essential characteristic for success in America.

The findings indicate, even with teachers, that at least partial assimilation is the goal of the sample. It appears that as the 1960s and 1970s were the decades for blacks, the 1980s will be the decade for Hispanics.

Political and social equality will be their goal. Maintenance of cultural patterns and support for bilingual education will be sustained, while wishing to fully participate in American society. Ethnic intermarriage and the desire to become American by the majority of the sample suggest a major step in the assimilation process. Since 89 percent of the sample was first generation, many of the cultural patterns they presently wish to retain may become less important in later generations. The findings suggest that although acculturation is taking place, a certain degree of separateness (based on religion, ethnic identity and behavioral patterns) exists and will be sustained in the future. This will have particular significance for education in terms of school curriculum, bilingual programs and desegregation of schools (e.g. predominantly Hispanic schools do not nor wish to participate in Chicago public schools desegregation plan). To maintain a Hispanic pluralistic culture either they must develop educational institutions to educate their offspring or maintain the Hispanic nature of the neighborhood public schools. The latter appears to be the more viable alternative. Hispanics want bilingual programs for Hispanic children and to sustain their cultural identity. The growing Hispanic population and subsequent voting strength makes this group a political force. In addition bilingual education has given Hispanic adults a vehicle for social mobility and economic improvement. Bilingual education created career professionals such as teachers and administrators in the school as well as researchers and bureaucrats at all levels of government. The desire to maintain their culture and language has created a legal status. This has led to an increase in cultural heritage, Spanish as a language has increased its status equal to other languages. Bilingual education, being the vehicle for language and cultural rights, the progress toward obtaining other rights and opportunities for Hispanics cannot be far behind. Thús, the concept of pluralism is

maintained in our society Hispanics, too, wish to become Americans, but with their own cultural identity.